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Speaking for the land. Looking at Aboriginal tourism today through the Bardi-Jawi example (Kimberleys, Western Australia)

Céline Travesi

Introduction

1 Bardi and Jawi are two Indigenous language groups from the Dampier Peninsula, in the north-west Kimberleys, Western Australia. Originally, Bardi and Jawi-speaking people lived on different although adjacent "countries" or territories. Jawi were islander people while Bardi lived on the mainland. They share the same kinship system, social organisation, and the same Law (Robinson 1973 : 106 ; Bagshaw 1999, 18–20 ; Glaskin 2002 : 41). They finally went to form one single group for their native title claim. Today, the Bardi-Jawi community numbers about a thousand people living on the peninsula.

2 In 1986, the government agreed to give them back a part of their land as freehold. This land was used to operate a lighthouse that had just been automated. Bardi and Jawi turned it into a tourist place. Once a campground, *Kooljaman at Cape Leveque* became one of the most successful Indigenous owned and operated tourist "resorts" in Australia.

3 At Kooljaman, Bardi and Jawi people operate the place and take decisions while non-Indigenous managers run the place on a daily basis.

4 Today, *Kooljaman at Cape Leveque* hosts about 30 000 visitors a year. The place offers campsites and other accommodations (including safari-tents, cabins, beach shelters), and a restaurant. Visitors can stay for the day or more and book Indigenous tours.

5 The Indigenous tours are based on activities like hunting, gathering and fishing, the local Indigenous interpretation of the landscape, and information about the local culture and history. They also allow visitors to access normally restricted land.

6 Anthropologists working on Australian Indigenous tourism are not many. Jon Altman made interesting contributions regarding mainly the socioeconomic issues of the development of Indigenous tourism in Australia. One of these issues for instance was that tourism could affect “traditional economic activities” or the “traditional authority structures”. With Julie Finlayson (1992) they identified key factors for what they called sustainable Indigenous tourism development.

7 I mentioned Altman’s work because it is one of main anthropological research on Indigenous tourism in Australia, still it mostly addressed socioeconomic aspects or political economy, as most of the other research on Aboriginal tourism. However Indigenous tourism can’t be reduced to its economic aspects.

8 And although its economic potential was the main reason for Bardi and Jawi to engage with tourism, it is not their only motivation. Here I argue that symbolic and political aspects are central to an analysis of Australian Indigenous tourism.

9 More precisely, I’m concerned with the politics of knowledge involved in Indigenous tourism. By politics of knowledge I mean not only the conditions of production and uses of knowledge, but also the dynamics of its transmission, circulation, retention or dispute. The idea is to pay attention to the situations where knowledge becomes a political resource, to the ways it is shared or not, and how it can involves or serve power relationships. Looking at these politics in Bardi-Jawi tourism, it is possible to suggest that Bardi and Jawi tour guides try to enforce a right to control land access, a right that was only partially recognised by their native title. In fact they try to convince visitors to respect restricted land access. In doing so they more generally assert an authority to speak about the land on its behalf. But they also assert a discursive authority, the right to produce authoritative discourses and knowledge about themselves. Bardi-Jawi tour guides then reverse a relation of domination that is made tangible in their interactions with tourists.

10 One of the hurdles of Indigenous tourism development that Altman and Finlayson identified was what they called the “Indigenous reluctance to regularity and punctuality”. Most Bardi and Jawi tour guides actually take their time. But they used it to stress the specificity of their tours : they tell tourists that they will have to expect a tour with a different pace and adapt to local temporality.

Speaking about the land on its behalf

Respecting the land and respecting the people

11 At Kooljaman, tourists are asked to respect restrictions on land access. Since the determination of their native title recognising their land rights, Bardi and Jawi people can refuse, regulate and control the use and enjoyment of their land by others. So they ask visitors to seek for permission and to be accompanied by a Bardi or Jawi person when going beyond the public main road and communities.

12 Understanding and respect are two words used by most Bardi and Jawi tour guides to explain what they expect from tourists in relation to the land and the local people. And this means respecting restrictions on land access indicated by road signs and notices. The first reason that the tour guides give to explain these restrictions is cultural.

Certain places contain significant spiritual sites and ceremonial grounds that even Bardi and Jawi people only attend on specific occasions and with caution.

13 Another discourse is concerned with tourists' safety. Bardi and Jawi tour guides talk about a « duty of care », of their responsibility to warn their visitors who could get mad and even die by going to the wrong places that are imbued with metaphysical powers.

14 Finally, Bardi and Jawi also tell visitors about the existence of many invisible burial sites that they could profane without knowing it. This is usually a convincing argument because tourists say that they feel deeply concerned with these matters (maybe more than with the cultural ones).

15 Bardi and Jawi tour guides also speak about their connections with land as well as about their responsibility to look after it, introducing places with the following words : "this is my father's country", or "I'm the boss for this place". They also explain that these connections and responsibilities give them the authority to speak on behalf of the land.

16 During their tour, Bardi and Jawi guides share and promote some of their extensive ecological knowledge. And they explain how to read the land and how to interpret the landscape.

17 Bardi-Jawi relationship with their land is presented as a very special one, made of understanding and respect. But the tour guides also reappropriate globalised discourses on the importance of taking care of and respecting the environment.

18 Now why talking about their connections with land and responsibilities towards it?

19 And why so much promoting ecological knowledge and presenting relationships with land as so special?

20 I believe that doing so, tour guides reassert their cultural entitlement to take decisions concerning land use and access. This entitlement is given by their various individual and collective connections with land.

21 This entitlement is given more legitimacy by the impression that Bardi and Jawi people have an almost natural ability to look after the land and to know what is best for it.

Bardi-Jawi tourism and politics of knowledge

Tourism as a new context of seeking for recognition

22 Bardi and Jawi people are in fact connected to different places within and beyond the limits of their land. According to people I met, connection gives an authority to speak on behalf of a place, as well as the responsibility to look after it. Connection also gives access to the knowledge that is associated with the place.

23 The more connections one can claim, the more knowledge he can get and more authoritative is his status. One can tell stories or share knowledge associated to the places he is connected with. But sharing stories or knowledge with which one has no connection, is only possible if permission has been granted. It is also required to acknowledge the person who did so and the place where the knowledge comes from. Thus possession and use of knowledge, through connections with different places, is a validating source of authority for Bardi and Jawi people.

24 It is possible to consider that talking to tourists about theses connections in addition to the celebration of a unique understanding and knowledge of the land, all work in the

direction of an assertion of an authority over land matters. And this assertion arises in a context where Bardi and Jawi people try to enforce one of the rights recognised by their native title determination. In fact, this right, to refuse, regulate and control use and access to their land was only partially recognised : it was not recognised over the ocean (part of Bardi-Jawi "land" includes adjacent islands and their surrounding waters).

Teaching tourists

25 I argue that Bardi-Jawi tourism can be seen as another context of analysis of the Aboriginal political consciousness (Tonkinson, 1999) where knowledge politics inform broader political claims and assertions. In addition to the authority of decisions over land matters, Bardi and Jawi also assert a discursive authority, not just about the land but also about themselves. For in tourism they don't just talk about land. They also produce knowledge about their culture and about who they are, and are not. For instance, they stress that they don't blow didgeridoo and don't make dot paintings. And the authority and legitimacy of this knowledge is made tangible in the positions of students and the relation of dependence in which tourists are put.

26 In their relationships with tourists, Bardi-Jawi tour guides are not just trying to convince people to respect restrictions on land access, that is to enforce a right, nor are they just asserting their authority over land matters, they are also reversing a relation of domination where after being told who they were or should be, they explain who they are. They assert a discursive authority is made tangible in the way tour guides not just share their knowledge but teach it.

27 Teaching tourists is an important concern for Bardi and Jawi tour guides. One of them, calling tourists his students often says that he's "working hard on their brains". He regularly asks questions during his tour in order to check whether or not tourists listen to what he says. He also likes to tease tourists about their ignorance.

28 To some extent tourists are also in a relation of dependence towards their guide. First, to access local ecological knowledge and to learn about the local culture and people, but also for material aspects, including indications on how to deal with the local conditions like the heat, the mud, the mosquitos or on how not to get lost in the mangroves.

29 Indigenous tour guides also tell tourists about cultural protocols and they cannot be told.

30 Sometimes tour guides even play the anthropologist, talking about some of the matters we discussed here, giving their interpretation of the contemporaneity of Aboriginal people, modernity and change. Whether or not they reappropriate anthropological or more global discourses, probably yes, but I believe that it is more complex than that.

31 However this analysis in terms of relations of domination should not be overStated.

32 Most tourists like the idea of learning something, and in fact ask for this. Learning about the local culture and history was one of the main expectations that came out of a survey I conducted with tourists. Some of them even said to me « that's why we're here, to learn ».

33 Some thought that there was a lot to absorb and that it was hard to remember everything. But they appreciated the educative aspect of the tour and their tour guide's pedagogic skills.

34 Moreover the tourist encounter cannot be reduced to this. Not all tour guides have the same kind of relationships with every tourist, so the situation should not be oversimplified. It is in fact far more complex, tour guides and tourists also acting out a kind of communitas, both looking for an experience of sharing. The first thing that Australian tourists and Indigenous tour guides share is a passion for the footie. Most of the time it is the first thing with which they begin when they start a discussion. But they also exchange political views about Australian politics and ideas about Aboriginal social issues or the relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

Conclusion

35 Anthropologists already stress the important issue of knowledge and its production and uses in various contexts of contemporary Indigenous Australian politics (Hollinswoth 1992 ; Beckett 1988 ; Tonkinson 1999) and it is often seen as a political resource (Trigger 1997).

36 In Bardi-Jawi tourism it is used to assert an authority to speak about the land on its behalf, and to enforce a right to control access and use of the land, by convincing visitors to respect restricted access. But it is also used to assert a discursive authority, the right to produce authoritative discourses and knowledge about themselves. Bardi-Jawi tour guides then reverse a relation of domination that is made tangible in their interactions with tourists.

37 I argued that Indigenous tourism could be seen as another context of analysis of Aboriginal political consciousness (Tonkinson, 1999), along land rights, aesthetics movements or the arena of political activism, where what is asserted, although not always explicitly, is an authority to speak about themselves and take decisions.

38 This analysis of Bardi-Jawi tourism is maybe a call to investigate more systematically contemporary Indigenous knowledge politics in various contexts. These politics can help understand wider politics.

39 As for Bardi-Jawi concerns, what they obtain from tourism is of mixed results. Most tourists respect restrictions on access and some even support Indigenous claims of control over decisions. But some also overlook restrictions and can often be seen wandering around Bardi-Jawi country.

40 This short analysis of Bardi-Jawi tourism and its knowledge politics could be developed further to include a reflection about the consequences of these politics or their relations with the distribution of status and positions within the Aboriginal community.

41 From what has been discussed yesterday, it seemed that the tension between applied and academic anthropology was stronger than between Australian and European anthropology. But what reunite us today is a fieldwork where we all have to negotiate the right and conditions of conducting research and where the once-so-called subjects of the research ask us to question our own practices. And we have to question the way we want to conduct research. It has to be done according to strong research ethics and we need to understand that the people with whom we work are concerned with issues

of discursive authority, authorship and control over the circulation of their knowledge or of knowledge that is produced about them. We need to understand and respect local politics of knowledge. As one Bardi man never missed an occasion to remind me (and it is the same with tourists), I don't know much myself. The once-so-called "informants" of anthropology no longer want their knowledge to be taken away from them, nor want to be told who they are or taught what to do. Today they want to share and exchange knowledge and teach others, among which tourists and anthropologists.

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